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C O N F I D E N T I A L TIRANA 000628

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SUBJECT: SOCIALIST PARTY CONGRESS: RAMA'S REFORMS AND LEFT-WING UNITY

Classified By: CDA STEVEN ZATE. REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (SBU) Albania's Socialist Party (SP) held its first Congress since its bitter defeat last July in Parliamentary elections and the ascendancy of Tirana Mayor Edi Rama to the Chairmanship of the party last fall. Former Chairman, and fallen PM, Fatos Nano, was nowhere to be seen and his supporters lay low for the most part. The party passed a number of reforms -- most notably enshrinement of the one member-one vote principle to elect Chairmen, and a bold initiative to place more women in elected positions -- but the highlight was a strong show of left-wing unity in hopeful anticipation of local elections early next year. SP prodigal son (and now LSI Chairman) Ilir Meta was welcomed with cheers when introduced by Rama -- an event unthinkable a year ago.
End summary.

¶2. (U) On June 10, the Socialist Party (SP) held its Congress in Tirana. About 500 delegates from all over Albania participated. Special invitees included the leaders of the small left-wing parties, all of which have recently concluded cooperation agreements with the SP. These parties were represented by their Chairmen -- Ilir Meta, Socialist Movement for Integration (LSI); Skender Gjinushi, Social-Democratic Party (PDS); Neritan Ceka, Democratic Alliance (PAD); and Paskal Milo, Social Democracy Party (PDS). Guest of honor for the event was Chairman of the International Socialist and Greek party PASOK leader George Papandreou. Other visitors included Hashim Thaci, Chairman of Kosovo's Democratic Party; a representative of the Alliance for Kosovo's Future (Rrnamush Haradinaj's party). The participants were shown video-taped greeting messages from other international left-wing representatives, such as the General Secretary of the Italian Democratic Socialist Party, Piero Fassino and the President of the European Socialist Party, Paul Nyurup Rasmussen.

¶3. (U) Fatos Nano, former chairman of the SP, was absent. Nano's visible supporters -- a small group of participants -- tried a few times to chant his name, but were countered by others exclaiming Rama's name, causing the Nano supporters to progressively scale back their efforts.

¶4. (U) SP General Secretary Pandeli Majko opened the conference, speaking about upcoming victory in the local elections. He referred to an all inclusive policy in the party, saying that the party needed everybody, including old-guard figures like Nano, Servet Pellumbi, Namik Dokle, and former President Rexhep Mejdani.

¶5. (U) SP Chairman Edi Rama spoke of the SP's defeat last July, saying that that the SP received the "slap that it deserved." He added, "Let anyone who thinks differently leave right now, because then we will not condone, while pretending not to see or hear, the moral damage he will have done to our party." On upcoming local elections, Rama said the SP did not have time to loose, but should move forward.

¶6. (SBU) Rama mentioned corruption, but he referred only to petty communal or municipal elected officials, thus avoiding any issue of high-level corruption within the SP. However, referring to past SP mistakes (including political divisions that resulted in fractioning and the creation of the LSI), Rama said: "The SP cannot, must not, and will not lose an election for the motives that brought it into the opposition. We will win precisely because we will show in words and deeds, everyday, that we have inherited from our past only our undeniable virtues and achievements."

¶7. (U) Rama attacked PM Berisha, asking for "our old prime minister to be sent home, without allowing him to completely lose his wits while in office."

¶8. (U) Rama talked at length about the unity that the left-wing parties claim to have just regained and about the potential it represents. Referring to the SP's already declared intention to seek early general elections next year, Rama said, "it is up to us to carry out the change of powers..." As proof of the unity, Rama gave a special greeting to LSI chair Ilir Meta, as well as to other three small parties, the chairmen of which joined him on stage at the end of his speech.

¶9. (U) Chairman of the International Socialist and of the Greek opposition party PASOK, George Papandreou, spoke as the guest of honor and asserted that Albania's Greek minority was a bridge for the development of the relations between the two

countries. Papandreu offered strong support for "his friend" Edi Rama.

¶10. (C) In the afternoon session, reserved only for delegates, the Congress approved changes proposed to its Statute by a vote of 456 votes in favor and only 11 against. Some QP luminaries, suspected of being Nano supporters, had not voted 604e e.g., Petro Koci, Ilir Zela, Qen Lushi, IAqQQQakrori, etc.). Koci told t(a e@da adDersApDsp(a4 this was the first Congra2s g(epe fodE ape 4g/a place. The new Statute 2a,c4,fdd DhE NhBiQ ! \$ regulations for punishing QPQQQ,e,b\$b0Q EpTaQhQqQ`\$ the one member-one vote pQa.c(` ` b,BQQQEHaQ)b aParty Ch@ women participation`Q a@`8QGQAhC(Q 0 percent in the electoral Q`Q`Q`\$A@QCPQ Q sources from the SP claimeQQQ Q Q@Q@QQQ liberalization of the parOy, others saw the changes as a means for Rama to consolidate his 245-day old chairmanship of the Oarty.

¶11. (C) COMMENT: Internal dissent within the SP seems to have scaled back in the last two months as Rama has pursued reconciliation agreements with Meta's LSI and the other small party allies. In doing so, Rama has brought everyone's focus on the upcoming local elections -- now scheduled for late 2006 or early 2007 -- and, given the short time frame, underscored the need for internal party unity in advance of those elections. The Opposition clearly hopes that a strong showing in those elections, combined with a subsequent Parliamentary deadlock over selection of a new president in the summer of 2007, will set the stage for early Parliamentary elections and their possible return to power as soon as next year.
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